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TAGS: [PREL](#) [MARR](#) [PARM](#) [TU](#)  
SUBJECT: INFLUENCING TURKEY'S APPROACH TO ADDRESSING  
THREATS IN THE BLACK SEA REGION

Classified By: Ambassador James F. Jeffrey for reason 1.4 (b, d)

Summary and Comment  
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¶1. (C) Turkey's approach to the Black Sea and its perception of potential threats in the wider Black Sea region differ sharply from our own and from that of other littoral states. Turkey has consistently resisted almost every attempt to broaden membership of Black Sea-related organizations beyond the six states which actually have coastline. With the longest -- by far -- Black Sea coastline and an obligation to manage the Straits defined by international law, Turkey believes that it should have the leading role in setting any collective Black Sea security policy. Turkey believes its leadership in the Black Sea provides a security benefit to the wider region, and particularly to NATO. While Turkey's view of the Black Sea as a members-only club has frustrated states and organizations which seek a larger role, its leadership has supported U.S. and NATO goals for the region for decades.

¶2. (C) Since Russia's actions in Georgia in August 2008, however, other littoral states perceive a growing threat to regional security; Turkey is concerned, but not to the extent that others are. Turkey's approach to Russia has been consistent: It seeks to remain engaged in discussion with Russia at every available forum. In contrast, the approach of other littoral states has tended more toward seeking support from each other and from outside actors, including the U.S. The immediate problems we thus have include efforts by NATO and particularly EUCOM to become more involved in the Black Sea, Turkey's push for ever more institutionalization of Turkish-led Black Sea states-only organizations and our various friends among the Black Sea states (particularly Georgia and Romania) resisting Turkish leadership as too soft on Russia and hard on U.S. presence. As it is unlikely that Turkey will relax its definition of the Black Sea region, we should instead focus on informing Turkey of how other littoral states perceive regional threats and on persuading Turkey to use its leadership role in the region to respond to these threats. End Summary and Comment.

Turkey In The Lead  
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¶3. (C) The Turks are enthusiastic supporters of institutions supporting dialogue for improved regional security, but they support only one Black Sea organization -- the Organization for Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC) -- which has membership beyond the six littoral states. In addition to BSEC, the inventory of relevant organizations includes:

- Operation Black Sea Harmony,
- BlackSeaFor,

- the Black Sea Defense Ministerial, and
- the Caucasus Stability and Cooperation Platform.

¶4. (C) Each is a good examples of how Turkey is ready to engage regional partners in dialogue and in some activities aimed at improving regional stability. The common thread in all of these organizations is Turkish leadership. Turkey takes its leadership role in the Black Sea seriously and resents perceived attempts, particularly by non-littoral states, to impinge on that role. Turkey's view is that it supports NATO's goals in the Black Sea region by working to maintain security and stability and also by sharing information (gained through Operation Black Sea Harmony) with NATO on potential illicit shipments transiting the Black Sea.

#### Montreux

¶5. (C) With both physical and legal (through the 1936 Montreux Convention) control of the only maritime access to the Black Sea and a coastline far longer than that of any other littoral state, no one disputes Turkey's leadership in the region. Montreux specifically places the security of the Straits and the maintainance of the military provisions in the hands of Turkey. Diplomatic notification must be made to the Turkish government of transit of any warship through the Straits. Twice each year, all Black Sea states must report to Turkey the gross aggregate tonnage of their military fleets in the Black Sea. If at any time Turkey should feel itself threatened by war, per the Montreux Convention, the passage of warships through the Straits is "left entirely to the discretion of the Turkish Government." Achieving

Montreux as a replacement to the 1923 Lausanne agreement was a major victory for Turkish diplomacy and the convention represents one of the oldest still-active multilateral arms control regimes. While the U.S. is impacted by Montreux's limitations on our own freedom of maneuver in the Black Sea, historically the Soviet Union and Russia have been most affected, leading to various Soviet challenges to the regime, notably in 1946.

#### Recent Developments

¶6. (C) But while other littoral states recognize Turkey's right to leadership, they do not necessarily believe that Turkey should decide how to evaluate threats on their behalf or to define how the Black Sea region should respond to these threats. When concern in August 2008 over Russian military action in Georgia was at its height, Turkey was helpful, providing assistance, increased intelligence, blanket access to airspace, opening borders (even with Armenia) and finding ways to help the USG increase its naval presence in the Black Sea (though always within the limits set by Montreux). But it also launched the Caucasus Stability and Cooperation Platform during the peak of international indignation. To some observers, this step smacked of appeasement; to others, including littoral states, it seemed as though Turkey was unwilling to impose political consequences on Russia for its actions.

¶7. (C) Now that the crisis with Georgia has passed, Turkey is ready, more quickly than other littoral states, to return to engagement with Russia, and proposed a Black Sea Defense Ministerial meeting for April 2009. While this meeting was eventually postponed indefinitely, Georgia and other littoral states turned to the USG with questions about Turkey's apparent lack of understanding of the threat they believed Russia still posed in the region.

¶8. (C) Turkey's readiness to engage with Russia stems from two basic factors: First, the Turks believe that it is better to be engaged in dialogue with Russia, even if the substance of that dialogue is not productive. Second, they do not perceive Russia as a significant threat to their security, as other littoral states clearly do. Turkey's bilateral

relationship with Russia is strong and, while it recognizes the dangers of its energy dependence on Russia, Turkey seeks both to broaden and deepen its bilateral ties.

#### Toward Achieving A Greater U.S. Role

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¶9. (C) Turkey might view a more activist U.S. military role in the Black Sea as a threat to its own political interests in the region. Turkey does see the U.S. as a strong partner and will continue to engage with us, but sometimes its cooperation seems grudging, and the reasons behind their apparent hesitance are not always fully understood. EUCOM's announcement that it planned to host a Black Sea Chiefs of Defense (CHOD) Ministerial went over like a lead balloon in Ankara. After some arm-twisting by the Ambassador and assurances that the U.S. does not wish to supplant Turkey as NATO's leader in the Black Sea, Turkey agreed to send a representative, but will not send the CHOD. In a later meeting, a senior diplomat suggested to us that Turkey would welcome a greater EUCOM role, but this should be approached gradually, first through direct engagement with Turkey alone, then widening the circle to include Romania and Bulgaria and then, after exercises and confidence-building measures, inviting all remaining littoral states, including Russia (provided its behavior remains reasonable). Should the CHOD conference as currently planned by EUCOM take place, even if there was no substance to discussions, he believed it would send a clear signal of a new antagonistic relationship with Russia on one side and the U.S. and other Black Sea states on the other.

¶10. (C) Changing Turkey's recognition of the potential threats to other littoral states is a challenge best approached without calling into question Turkey's leadership role in the Black Sea. By engaging Turkey through NATO, not always bilaterally, with ideas to address capability and intelligence gaps in the Black Sea, to improve the capability of newer and prospective NATO members, to track potential illicit shipments in the Black Sea and, finally, to show Alliance solidarity in order to deter any future Russian adventurism, would have the best chance of success.

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